

MINISTRY OF THE WORD,
ELDERSHIP,
AND
THE LORD'S SUPPER.

An earnest, loving Word from an ex-Clergyman to some of
his former Colleagues

BY
RICHARD HOLDEN.



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RECEIVED THE 17th APRIL 1881

TO THE

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MINISTRY OF THE WORD,

ETC.

*To some of my former Colleagues—Friends and Brethren
in Christ.*

DEAR BROTHERS IN THE LORD,

The blessings the Lord has granted me, the holy, happy liberty He has shown me, my heart longs to share with you. I cannot write to you all: so the press must serve my turn; and it may be the Lord will thus graciously make what I pen a source of light and blessing to others as well.

I want to ask you to look into the word a little with me, as to its teaching on ministry in the church of God; and I beg you by the remembrance of by-gone days of happy fellowship in Christ, and still more by the faithfulness we mutually owe to Him, to take into His own presence the scriptures to which I invite your attention, and seek their meaning from Himself.

If, as I trust, you still hold to the foundations of former days, we are at one as to the *supremacy* of holy scripture. We accepted together the state-

ment, and you still hold office on that ground, that "Holy scripture containeth all things necessary unto salvation: so that whatsoever is not found therein, or may not be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man to be believed."

This is well so far as it goes; but will you bear with me, dear brethren, if I suggest the enquiry, whether you are so far convinced of the *sufficiency*, the *absolute* and *complete* authority, of the word, that you are prepared to stand by it, and by it alone; ready so to test your ways and to shape your path by it, that, owning it as God's voice, you will desist from every single thing that has not its sanction, and follow unhesitatingly wherever it leads? If you have never seriously set that question before you, and looked it straight in the face, I ask you to do so now—to take it at once into His presence before you read another page, and settle with Him whether you are to regard the scriptures as His own voice, and to follow that absolutely or no.

If by grace you have reached this conviction, and accept *the book* as the divinely perfect expression of the Infinite mind, then you will agree with me that its *silences* are as much to be heeded in its interpretation as its *utterances*. You will hardly venture then on the ground taken by a Popish priest, who, when pressed by a friend of mine with the silence of scripture as to purgatory, replied that it *must have been an oversight!* No; we shall, I know, be fully agreed that there are no oversights in the word of the living God, nor any imperfections in His

mode of expressing His meaning. What He says is just what He means to say, and when He abstains from words, there is meaning in His *silence* and therefore as much danger of mistaking His mind by adding to as by abstracting from His word. (Deut. xii. 32; Prov. xxx. 6; Rev. xxii. 18, 19.)

But, you will say, why press a principle so self-evident, and on which we are so completely of a mind? I do so, dear brethren—and I trust you will bear with me in it—because experience has taught me how easy it is to hold in theory what we fail to act on in practice; and I desire that before turning to God's book we may be thoroughly at one that this is not to be with us a mere theory, to be acted on or laid aside at pleasure, but a principle by which our interpretation of the word must stand or fall; and with this view I ask you again, Is your mind made up, in God's presence, like Israel of old (Num. ix. 17–23), to *stop* where God stops, as well as to advance where He advances?

Trusting that I now carry you with me in this matter, and that so far there is no danger of falling out by the way, I invite you to consider this question: Whether, in the scriptures of the New Testament, you can find divine authority for making ministry of the word of God dependent on what is called ordination?

Now pray, dear brother, do not fall back on preconceived views of the matter, and conclude you already know it to be so; but go over the book and test it. If you find what confirms you in the belief

that there is, you will be none the worse for having searched the word anew about it, for one never does this without getting blessing in some form; and if haply it should prove otherwise, surely it is important that you get hold of *the truth*. And I venture fearlessly to affirm that your search, if honest and simple-minded, must result in a negative. You will find no such authority anywhere.

I cannot, of course, undertake to prove a negative; and, having stated what I believe to be God's truth, can only confide in your own faithfulness in research for its verification in your convictions. All I can do in furtherance is to ask you to weigh prayerfully and carefully with me one or two passages that have been supposed to teach otherwise.

Let us look first, together, at Acts xx. 28, where Paul reminds the *elders* of the church at Ephesus that the Holy Ghost had made them "overseers" (*ἐπισκόπους*), "to *feed* the church of God."

Here I would observe, first of all, though without seeking to dispute it, that it nowhere appears from the word that the Holy Ghost had made these men "overseers" *through the medium of human ordination*. Waving this, however, for the moment, what is intended by the charge "to feed" the church? Current notions accept it, as a matter of course, that it signifies to minister to them the word of God. We have entered, however, on the task of testing current notions, and finding the mind of the Spirit, which can only be done by the word itself.

What then is the sense in which the Spirit employs the word ποιμαίνω in the New Testament?

We shall find it used once again, in a similar connection to that we have under examination, in 1 Peter v. 2, where the elders are enjoined to “*feed* the flock of God;” but this manifestly gives us no help, inasmuch as the passage is in identical case with the one before us, and so in 1 Cor. ix. 7, and Rev. vii. 7.

In Matt. ii. 6 the translators have rightly rendered it “rule;” but as it seemed to them that the context *might possibly* admit the other sense, they have given “feed” in the margin.

When however we turn to Rev. ii. 27; xii. 5; xix. 15, we have a context that admits of no ambiguity. To *rule* with a rod of iron, and that even to the extent of dashing in pieces like a potter’s vessel, has no connection with *feeding* or with ministering the word, though it corresponds well with that part of a shepherd’s duties which pertains to the *governance* of the flock, the keeping it together and in order, and the defending it from harm, more needed in an unfenced pastoral country than among our well-fenced fields, where a flock may be left for hours or days without inspection. I have myself seen, in my youth, the very instrument named in the text in use on a farm in Scotland: a two-feet iron rod on a wooden handle of some four to five feet, the iron head bent into the orthodox curve of a “shepherd’s crook,” only less open than usually represented, formed to seize a sheep by the shank, and hold it so that it could not draw the foot through, and might thus be brought to

the shepherd's hand and under his power; and one need hardly say it would have proved quite equal to the breaking the head or back of a refractory sheep-worrying dog, or other such disturber of the peace. Only one passage there is (Jude 12) where "feeding" seems really the thought, though even there it is not the shepherd feeding the flock, but the flock feeding itself, so that the preponderance of evidence shows that *rule* is the thing intended by the Holy Ghost in His employment of the word ποιμαίνω. And this corresponds most accurately with the facts of a shepherd's charge. No shepherd in a pastoral country can be said properly to *feed* the flock, as might rightly be said where modern cut-turnip or hay-feeding is practised. He leads them where *they may find pasture*; he guides, controls, defends them when in health, and tends them when sickly; but he does not *feed* them in the proper sense. And here again we find confirmation of the Spirit's accuracy in the use of terms; for if we turn to John xxi. 15-17, we have the blessed Master employing this word, and another in a connection that marks clearly an intended distinction. In verse 15, "*feed* my lambs" is βόσκει, to tend while feeding;* whereas in verse 16 we have ποιμαίνε, "feed my sheep;" and then, in verse 17, βόσκει, "*feed* my sheep." Did the "Wisdom of God" employ these terms thus at random? Is verse 17 a mere repetition of verse 16 as to sense? or does the Lord's employment of two distinct words imply two distinct and separate ideas? Surely no

* In Scotch, "to herd."

reverential mind will hesitate to discern the beautiful propriety and force of the whole when to each expression its due weight is allowed. The little lamb has no need of the iron rod to control its movements and bring it into subjection; hence to watch over it while it feeds or is suckled by the dam is enough to enjoin on the shepherd; but the sheep needs both nurture and *control*, and so the double functions are assigned to the shepherd apostle.

The summing up gives us for the interpretation of the two passages (Acts xx. 28; 1 Peter v. 2), first, one other in which, if not absolutely beyond question, it is at least very near to a certainty that "rule" is intended; then three more (though but one expression) where it is unmistakably "rule;" a further employment of the word by the Lord in a manner strongly confirmatory; a correspondence with the facts of "shepherding;" a general harmony with other truths (which will become yet more fully apparent); and, on the other hand, one single passage only where "feed" seems to be the sense, 1 Cor. ix. 7 and Rev. vii. 17 being neutral in the matter.

Shall we turn our attention next to 1 Tim. iii. 2, where we have the qualifications for a bishop, overseer, or elder pointed out? Among these stands "apt to teach," διδακτικόν. Does this imply either of these three things: first, that those holding the office are the only persons authorized or qualified to teach; second, that teaching was a part of the functions proper to an ἐπίσκοπος; third, that "apt to teach" is

equivalent to the "gift" of a teacher in the sense of Ephesians iv. 2?

The first question we may, I think, dismiss at once as a *non sequitur*, which neither you nor I would hold for an instant. How then about the second? Does it follow, because ability for a certain thing may be a desirable qualification for an office, that it therefore belongs to the office as its proper function? or does it really amount to anything more than just this: that, inasmuch as the need may occasionally arise in the course of duty, it is fitting that the *employé* be found equal to the occasion when it occurs? Among the qualifications for appointments in the army or civil service of Great Britain are many items of requirement which, in a majority of cases, may never once come into play in the course of official duty, though prescribed for examination—a knowledge of Latin or French for instance. There is much *aptness to teach* that comes far short of such a position as that of a διδάσκαλος. An efficient Sunday-school teacher is certainly διδακτικός; but just as certainly does it not follow that he (or she) is a διδάσκαλος in the church of God? Moreover, one finds the same word used in 2 Tim. ii. 24, where it is no question of a "bishop" at all, but of any "servant of the Lord."

There remains but 2 Tim. ii. 2, as the only other scripture I can think of, calling for examination in this connection.

First then, Does the apostle's charge to Timothy here amount to an order to ordain?

Secondly, Does it imply at all that the “faithful men” were to be *ordained men* because they were to be *ἱκανοὶ διδάξαι*?

I meet the first question with another: Where the evidence? Can instruction in truth, for the purpose of transmission, be communicated only by or in connection with ordination to an office? We have agreed that we are not to add thoughts of our own to what the Spirit of God has written; here then is an occasion for the exercise of our subjection.

As to the second question, surely it would be a large conclusion to draw, that so general an expression as “faithful men” must mean men on whose heads hands had been laid, or that “faithful men” should not be able to teach unless ordained. The simple fact is, that by minds previously imbued with the long-taught notion that there exists an inseparable connection between ordination and any kind of teaching in the church of God, it has quietly been *taken for granted* that ordination *must be* the thing intended here. I take the force of the passage to be just the reverse; viz., that, inasmuch as ordained men and others were already failing and turning aside (as pre-intimated in Acts xx. 30), Timothy should seek the more earnestly to instruct “faithful men,” wherever he could find them, apart from all question of office. You may not be able to accompany me yet so far as this, but I think you must concur that, if we are to take these scriptures simply and without *addenda*, we shall find no support in them for the notion that ordination and the

ministry of the word are linked together in the New Testament; and if not in these, then certainly nowhere else.

Having seen then what *is not* in scripture, in connection with the ministry of the word, may I ask you next to accompany me in the investigation of what *is*?

Shall we begin by searching out the teaching concerning the ministers to whom the ministry of the word is entrusted?

The first passage I will ask you to weigh is Eph. iv. 7-13. Here we have the ascended Christ bestowing *gifts* (δόματα) on men, and the "men" we discern from the context, and from comparison with 1 Cor. xii. 28, to be those composing the Church of God. The δόματα themselves we perceive to be also *men*, endowed with certain qualifications, and classed under certain names—*apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors* and *teachers*, each of which will therefore claim consideration at our hands.

First then, *apostles*—ἀπόστολοι.

Had the Greek word been translated instead of being merely anglicized and naturalized into our tongue, we should have had these described as *sent-ones*, or *messengers*; but as the latter term is employed to translate ἄγγελοι, *sent-ones*, though clumsy, gives the clearest sense.

By the word ἄγγελος we find designated at one time certain *messengers* of a celestial order, to whom we have been wont to appropriate almost exclusively the name of *angels*; at another, ordinary human

messengers, as in Luke vii. 24, "the messengers (ἄγγέλων) of John;" in verse 27, John himself; in James ii. 25, Joshua's spies; and in 2 Cor. xii. 7, Paul's "thorn in the flesh, an *angel* of Satan."

After the same fashion we have the word ἀπόστολος applied to the *sent-ones* of the Lord Jesus, twelve of whom were so commissioned and named of Him while on earth (Luke vi. 13, *et all.*), and another subsequently from His place at the right hand of God. (Gal. i. 1; Acts ix. 6, 15, &c.) These are known in Scripture as "the apostles (*sent-ones*) of Christ." Besides these we have the term, as in the case of ἄγγελοι, applied to other *sent-ones*, as in Acts xiii. 2; xiv. 4, to those sent forth on a special mission by the Holy Ghost, one of whom was also, though the other was not, an apostle of Christ; then, in 2 Cor. viii. 23, "the messengers (ἀπόστολοι) of the churches;" in Phil. ii. 25, "Epaphroditus, your messenger" (ἀπόστολον), viz., of the Philippians; and in some such sense perhaps Andronicus and Junia. (Rom. xvi. 7.) In our passage the apostles of Christ are those in question—His own δόματα to the Church.

Prophets, as the name (προφήτης) implies, and as the examination of their ministry throughout the word makes clear (*e.g.* John iv. 19), were *speakers on the part of God*, who gave out His mind *directly from Himself* and *with His authority*, reproving, exhorting, rebuking, instructing, or foretelling the future, as the case might be.

Next in order we find *evangelists*, propagators of and instructors in the "glad tidings," as is sufficiently

evident from the usage of *εὐαγγελίζω* in Scripture, and need not therefore occupy us.

Pastors come next before us—*ποιμένες*, *shepherds*. It will come out clearly, I think, as we advance, that these are by no means to be confounded with the elders of Acts xx. and 1 Peter v., though these are called *shepherds*, and those are charged “*to shepherd*.” Neither the sphere nor the functions are identical, as will after appear. The charge of the one is purely spiritual, that of the others governmental.

Finally, we have *teachers* (*διδάσκαλοι*), whose name sufficiently indicates their charge; not, as the prophets, to speak from God with His *authority*—“Thus saith the Lord”—but, with divinely given ability and power of the Holy Ghost, to teach what under His teaching they have learned from the word—being, like the *evangelists*, unmistakably *ministers of the word and doctrine*.

When we come to enquire into the *functions* and *sphere* of these divinely given ministers, we find it to be “for the perfecting* of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying (building up) of the body of Christ,” and this “till we all come unto a perfect man (*ἄνδρα τέλειον*) to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”

Here, as we see, it is the building up of “the body of Christ” (compare Gen. ii. 22, margin) that is in question. It is not till we all come to *perfect men* as individuals, but till we all come to “a perfect man”—the completed mystical Christ of 1 Cor. xii.

* Not *τελειόω*, but *καταρτίζω*, to repair.

12—"the church which is His body," His "fulness" (Eph. i. 22, 23), the measure of whose complete stature is the end to be reached. In plain terms, these δόματα are bestowed *until the church of God be completed*; their office being to build up that body by exercising their ministry for the perfecting of the saints who compose it. As to whom these saints are, I know we shall be agreed; for with me you would own none as members of Christ but true believers, and *all* such.

But now, if the sphere of this ministry has relation to the body of Christ, and the *gifts* are bestowed "till" that be completed, how about the *apostles* and *prophets*? The "body" is not yet built up, and these have long disappeared from the scene. Most true as to their persons, but not of their ministry. In this they, being dead, yet speak in the writings of the New Testament, and through these will continue to edify the body of Christ and to minister to the perfecting of the saints till the end; while, that no continuance of such in person was contemplated, is made yet more evident from the place assigned them in the church, when viewed as "God's building" or "house," where they are located *in the foundation* (Eph. ii. 20), thereby excluding all idea of *succession*, inasmuch as no building has successive tiers of foundations, but successive tiers or layers of masonry deposited on and resting throughout on the one foundation tier, laid in its turn on the living rock, when the building can boast of being builded on a rock. (Matt. vii. 24, 25; xvi. 18; 1 Peter ii. 4, 5, &c.)

Evangelists, pastors and teachers, however, to whom no such foundation place was assigned, and who are perpetuated by no such divinely inspired medium, if they continue at all to minister to the edification of the body, must do so through a continued bestowal of *gifted men*; else the destined end must fail. It is therefore a question of fact whether we have such now.

This advances us to another stage of our investigation; viz., What have we in scripture as to the *qualification* of these persons? We shall not, I think, encounter any description of their characteristics, as in the case of elders and deacons, (unless 2 Tim. iv. 2 be taken as partially descriptive of "the work of an evangelist;") but this we *shall see* clearly enough, that their qualification for ministry is *divine gift* (χάρισμα or δωρεὰ with χάρις). So in Eph. iv 7: "Unto every one of us is given grace (χάρις) according to the measure of the *gift* (τῆς δωρεᾶς) of Christ;" and in Rom. xii. 6: "Having therefore *gifts* (χαρίσματα) differing according to the grace (χάρις) that is given unto us;" and again in 1 Peter iv. 10: "As every man hath received the *gift* (χάρισμα), even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace (χάριτος) of God." The bestowal of the qualifying χάρισμα on the individual constituted *him* a δόμα to the Church. Surely nothing could be plainer or simpler.

One more question meets us here: Under what *authority* did these men minister, or exercise their gifts?

We have already looked into the negative side of this subject, and seen that it certainly does not appear from Scripture to have been in virtue of ordination. We now arrive at the point where the investigation of the positive side becomes fitting.

“What saith the Scripture? how readest thou?” If you read with me once more 1 Peter iv. 10, 11, you may there discover the needed light. “As every man hath received the gift, minister the same one to another.” As he has received it; and how is that? From man or through man? Most clearly not; and accordingly, “if any man minister, let him do it as *of the ability* (ἐξ ἰσχύος) *which God giveth.*” Surely this is unmistakably plain as to the authority under which the man is to act. Responsible to his Lord, he is to act as from Him—to minister the gift just as he has received it, without any question of first submitting it to the test, much less subjecting it to the sway, of any human authority. In like manner, in Rom. xii. 6–8, the possession of the gift is the warrant to use it, no intervening authorization being so much as hinted at; while in 1 Cor. xii. 28 it is, “*God* hath set some in the Church;” and in verses 4–11 it is unmistakably the Holy Ghost alone who is looked on as the *ordaining One*.

Now please to note, dear brethren, that I do not for a moment question the Holy Ghost’s *power* or *title* to confer either gifts or office, mediately through human intervention, when He pleases; and *if Scripture evidence be forthcoming* that He does so at this day, I stand prepared to own it at once. We have,

in fact, one plain instance of His having bestowed a *gift* (mark, not an *office*, but a χάρισμα) on one person, with the joint ministration of the laying on of the hands of an apostle and a presbytery (1 Tim. iv. 14; 2 Tim. i. 6 *); but then we also find present an element in the case which marks it as entirely exceptional, and takes it out of the range of application to present circumstances. It was done “by prophecy:” a divinely-inspired prophet, whether Paul himself or another, intimated the Spirit’s will that a *gift* should be conferred on Timothy, through the laying on of Paul’s hands; and so the thing was done at His bidding. Unless we can produce a like authority, we have no warrant to copy the act. Another similar instance we have in Acts xiii., where the Holy Ghost appointed two persons to a special mission (not an *office*), and called on those present to “separate” them to the work, which was done by the laying on of hands—a case again beyond precedent for us, in the absence of similar direct divine intimations. Let such be proved (as pretended to by Irvingism), and not even these precedents were needed; but, lacking such, the precedents themselves are of no avail.

We have now seen, dear brethren, that the *divine order* for the ministry of the word, as seen in the New Testament, is, through men bestowed on the church as divine *gifts* to it, so constituted by the communication to them of qualifying χαρίσματα by the Holy

* I accept the generally-assumed identity of the acts; if any dispute this, it would only show he got two gifts instead of one.

Ghost, the possession of which gifts conferred *ipso facto* the authority and responsibility to minister. (1 Cor. ix. 16 ; Matt. xxv. 14-30 ; Luke xix. 12-27.) If therefore there exist to-day in the church of God men so gifted by the same divine Spirit, the same authority and responsibility are theirs now as then ; and solemn indeed must be the guilt of any human interposition intruded between the church's Head, or the Holy Ghost His Administrator, and the servants whom He has "set in the church" "as it hath pleased Him." If the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each for collective profit (*πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον*—1 Cor. xii. 7)—if Christ's ordinance be that the body make increase unto the edifying of itself in love, through the ministry of "that which *every* joint supplieth" (Eph. iv. 16), what must be the guilt of any action which obstructs that divine order, and quenches the Spirit ? (1 Thess. v. 19.*)

Beloved brethren, suffer the word of exhortation for the blessed Master's sake. Bear with me if I urge on you once more to deal with these things in His own presence—to be before Him in it all, like Hezekiah in the temple. Put it solemnly, each one to himself, Am I clear in this matter ? Weigh, dear brethren, the facts of your position in the light of what we have seen in the word, and test by that its faithfulness. How stands it with the congregation to which you minister ? Are there, mayhap, persons in that congregation divinely set in the church as

* Observe that this text addresses the church of God, not unbelievers.

evangelists, or *pastors*, and *teachers*, whom your official appointment as sole minister excludes from all exercise of their gifts, and who have been so tutored, by the system under which they have been trained, to repress all divine impulses in that direction as irregularities, unless they could first go through a lengthy and costly college training, and get human authorization to minister, that the sense of responsibility has been quashed, and the gift, instead of being *stirred up*, suffered to lie idle, buried in a napkin, till both its possessor and others ignore its existence?

Reflect, dear brother, that on any given Lord's-day there might be present in the midst a dozen other divinely-gifted persons, through any of whom it might be the Spirit's wish to edify the flock of God; but you, and those who have placed you there, forbid Him. He must minister through you, at the dictate of human will, instead of "dividing to every man severally *as He will*," or not at all. Did any other, at His bidding, presume to open the mouth, he would risk being thrust out as a disorderly person and a disturber of the peace. I bow my head in humiliation when memory recalls how long and how oft I was guilty in this matter, as occupying such an unscriptural position. Beloved brethren, look to it in time, "that we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming." Surely, surely it is no *abiding in Him* to have departed so completely from His *word* in this matter! Believe me, it is in no fault-finding spirit I thus write, but in heartfelt sympathy and brotherly love, under a sense

of my own complicity in it all, when, as you to-day, I did it ignorantly.

Direct we now our attention to another portion of the subject. Since we have seen that there is no connection in scripture between *ordination* and the ministry of the word, while yet ordination in some form is unquestionably met with there, it will become us to enquire to what end, and by whom, such ordination was practised.

There are two classes of office-bearers in connection with whom ordination seems spoken of in the New Testament: *elders* or *bishops*, and *deacons*. Let us take up the former.

Shall we enquire first into the *functions* of eldership as taught in the word?

There can be no question that *overseeing* was a part of the functions, since this is made plain both by the title of bishops or overseers (*ἐπίσκοποι*), given to them in 1 Tim. iii. 1, 2, and Titus i. 7; in Acts xx. 17, 28, where they are identified under both names of *elders* and *overseers*; and in 1 Peter v. 2, where they are enjoined to "take the oversight" of the flock of God.

In the next place *ruling* or governance is as clearly attributed to them in 1 Tim. v. 17, taken along with iii. 4, 5, which points out ability to *rule* a man's own house, as an indispensable prerequisite to his attempting to *rule* or take care" (*ἐπιμέλομαι*) of the Church of God.

And finally we have the charge laid on them to "shepherd" (*ποιμαίνειν*) the flock in Acts xx. 28, and

1 Peter v. 2, into whose meaning we have already enquired, and found it refer to the *ruling* functions of a shepherd.

We thus discover, from all the language employed concerning them, that *rule* was the proper function of the eldership; and, on the other hand, no Scripture whatever connects it in any way with the ministry of the word; for 1 Tim. v. 17, already referred to, intimates just the reverse; to wit, that the proper business of elders was "to rule," though some among them might be found who also ministered in the word and doctrine, or, in other words, were men on whom the Holy Ghost had also bestowed spiritual gifts for ministry, which would not of course disqualify them for eldership, but, on the contrary, render them all the more fitted for it. Ex. xviii., Num. xi., &c., show us that eldership had the same character under the former dispensation, distinct from all ministry in holy things, which pertained to priests and Levites.

Having seen then what the function of the office is, let us next enquire into the *qualifications* for it. And here we shall have occasion to own and admire the perfection of the divine wisdom in the distinctions He makes; for when it was a question merely of teaching, or ministry of the word, apart from *authority* to *control* the conduct, all is referred to the divine gift, the servant being responsible to his Master alone, and the others responsible to the Same to own and avail themselves of it or not, to their own profit or detriment. When it is, on the

other hand, a question of *authority* for rule, demanding consequently subjection of the will and conduct, over and above the reference to the divine gift, there are minute indications given by which the persons may be discerned. In Rom. xii. 6-8, where the individual's own responsibility is treated of, and he is exhorted to fitting diligence, it is on the ground of his having "*gift*" according to the grace given him; while in 1 Tim. iii. 1-7, and Titus i. 6-11, where it is a question of others recognizing his fitness, and consequently divine appointment, ample details, such as *their* intelligence can take cognizance of, are supplied.

I do not ask you to enter with me on the detailed examination of these qualifications, as that is not needful; but will draw your attention to one point in Titus, which, if not carefully weighed, might be taken as implying some sort of ministry of the word. You will remark that the bishop must be one "holding fast the faithful word, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers." There is mention of doctrine most certainly here; but the context, when examined, shows that the sphere, as well as the use of the doctrine, is very different from that which we have seen in Ephes. iv. as proper to the ministry of the word. There it was "the perfecting of the saints, the edifying of the body of Christ;" here it is a question of "gainsayers" to be exhorted and convinced, and of stopping the mouths of unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, all which pertains to *rule*,

and for which end it was fitting that the elder be διδάκτικον, as in 1 Tim., and a holder fast of the faithful word, as here. No confusion in God's thoughts or God's order, dear brethren, when duly looked into.

When we enquire into the *authority* under which the *elders* exercised their office, the word refers us, as we have already seen in Rom. xii. 6–8, to the divine χάρισμα; but besides this we have also, in some instances at least, *ordination*, which we see in Acts xiv. 23 and in Titus i. 5. In 1 Timothy nothing is actually said about ordination; the qualifications for bishops and deacons are pointed out; that is all, unless verse 23 be accepted as referring to it. The above passages make it clear, that in the district of Asia Minor visited by Paul and Barnabas, elders were ordained by them in every church they visited, and that it was the apostle's desire that such should be ordained in every city of Crete. The general practice of it elsewhere stands merely as an *inference* from these facts. That inference I feel no disposition to question here, save in one instance where an exception appears to me clear from Scripture—the case of the church in Thessalonica, which suffices at once to prove that ordination, however desirable, was *not indispensable*, and to make plain the path of God's children in the matter when ordination is unattainable.

The case of Thessalonica is simply this: Paul (1 Thess. v. 12) exhorts that infant church to “know” those who laboured among them and *were over them*

in the Lord. Now, we have no proof that there were any ordained elders in Thessalonica; and if any one affirm it, the burden of proof lies on him. The language of the apostle leads fairly and legitimately to the inference that there were not; for to *know* or *discern* (εἰδέναι) is not the exhortation one would think of addressing to a church in reference to officers already set over them by a formal ordination: to obey, honour, respect, esteem, were fitting (as in Heb. xiii. 7); to *know* would seem out of place. Not so, however, if that infant church, bereft unexpectedly of the apostle's care only a few weeks after they had first heard the gospel, and before ordination had been effected, was left to its own spiritual discernment to discover those who *were over* them in the Lord. Observe again the language: not who *ought to be* over you—still less any hint that they themselves were to put them over them—but, who *are* over you. Over them how, and by what authority? Over them because the Holy Ghost, by conferring on them the χάρισμα and qualifying character, *had made* them overseers. This is plain and simple. If the apostle had enjoyed the opportunity he would have pointed out the men to them, and so have spared them all exercise about the matter; but to *point them out* in that way was all his ordination would have done; the men were there all the same, and in the absence of his aid they must discern and own them, letting them exercise the functions divinely bestowed. A most precious instance is this little passage of the prescient wisdom and tender

care and love of the Lord ; since, if it happen that we ourselves are in identical circumstances to-day, the guidance for our own procedure is here before us.

I next ask your attention, dear friends, to the *place* or *sphere* of eldership. We have seen what the ministry of the word has to say to the body of Christ, or to the church of God in that character. The church is, however, set before us in the word under another aspect beside that ; viz., the *house*, household, or family of God on the earth ; and it is with this aspect of it that elders have to do. If you turn to 1 Tim. iii. 15, you will find that, when giving him instructions about bishops and deacons, he expressly states that he writes these things that he may know how to behave himself “in the house of God,” which corresponds well with what we have in verses 4 and 5, where ability to “rule his own house” is indicated as fitness for rule in the church of God, which is *His* house. You will observe also, on looking at 1 Cor. xii. 28, where ministers of the word and rulers, &c., are all blended together, that the Holy Ghost has been most carefully accurate in His manner of so doing. All through the chapter, up to that verse, He had been speaking of “the body ;” but when He comes to this He suddenly changes the word, and substitutes “church,” which, being equally applicable to “body” and “house” (Eph. i. 22, 23 ; 1 Tim. iii. 15), corresponds exactly with the grouping of the classes named.

And here is now the place for looking at the dis-

inction between the pastors of Ephesians iv. and the elders, in respect of the charge to them also to "shepherd."

You can hardly fail, I think, after what we have gone into, to be as well satisfied as myself that the *ruling* functions of the shepherd are those assigned to the *elder*. The ποιμένες, however, we have seen, have for their sphere of labour the "edifying of the body of Christ," by ministering to the perfecting of the individual saints.

ERRATA.

Page 26, line 6, for 'what,' read 'that.'

Page 28, line 24, for 'he,' read 'Barnabas.'

... wounded spirit, strengthening the weak, raising the fallen, and the like; a house to house ministry of love in the bowels of Christ, most aptly described by "shepherding," though quite apart from that character of shepherding which we have seen assigned to the ἐπίσκοπος, or elder.

How complete, how matchlessly perfect, are God's ways! and ah, brother, how marred by man's weak and officious interference with their divine order!

And now, dear brethren, comes before us the solemn and most practical question, Is there any *ordaining* power or authority present in the church of God to-day? To many the bare thought of call-

ing it in question would seem like a blow aimed at the groundwork of the faith, so inveterate is the hold human traditions possess on the minds of thousands of God's dear children. Thank God, the foundations of our most holy faith stand on a basis more solid than these hay and stubble structures of man's creation. Are you ready to test it by the word, dear brother—by the word of God alone?

We have seen that ordination was practised in apostolic days; the next point for ascertainment is, By whom?

Acts vi. points out to us that, while in that instance the selection of the persons to be entrusted with the disbursement of the alms was left to the contributing church, the power to "appoint" them over the business was reserved by the apostles to themselves.

Acts xiv. 23 brings before us two persons associated in the act of choosing elders—Paul and Barnabas. Both are called apostles, or *sent-ones*, in verses 4 and 14, as sent of the Holy Ghost on the special mission on which they were then engaged. Paul was also an apostle of Jesus Christ. Whether he ordained in virtue of his special mission, or if under authority delegated from his associate apostle, does not appear; but this one thing is clear and certain, that if the former his position was unique, and if the latter then was he in the same case as we find Timothy and Titus, whom we see commissioned to ordain, in the exercise of an authority expressly delegated to them from the apostle.

Now, dear brethren, do you know anything beyond this in the word on the subject of ordination? I do not. The case of Timothy himself is often confounded with it; but we have already looked into that, and seen that not an ordination to an office, but the impartation of some kind of spiritual gift, was the thing effected for him by the laying on of hands; and that of Paul and Barnabas (Acts xiii.), though also sometimes cited in such connection, is equally wide of the mark, since, as we have seen, it was a special case of setting apart to a special mission two who were already classed among prophets and teachers, and concerning whom, in relation to eldership, nothing is anywhere intimated.

If therefore scripture is to rule, it is certain that none exercised ordaining authority save apostles and those directly deputed by them. What then? Have we apostles present among us to ordain? No!* Have we apostolic delegates? As distinctly, No! True there are those who pretend to a derived apostolic authority; but what have they to show for it? Had Timothy or Titus entered an assembly of believers in Asia or in Crete to "hold an ordination," a challenge of their authority would at once have been silenced by the production of the apostles' letters. Had Barnabas' authority been questioned, Paul stood by his side to make it good. But what semblance

* Irvingism claims to have. I candidly and fairly weighed their pretensions before I took my place among "Brethren," but found them empty and groundless.

of authority can those advance to-day who claim such powers? Do they talk of succession? The very first link in the chain is wanting—a chain suspended on nothing; for where, dear brethren, can we find in the word one single hint about the transmission to succeeding hands of an ordaining authority in the church of God? Search and research the scriptures, not a trace of it is there. The fact that apostles and their delegates ordained is patent, that no other did is just as patent, and no less so that scripture is *silent* as the grave as to any authorization to church or individual to continue it. And why is this? Did the Holy Ghost forget it? Perish the blasphemous thought! What means it then? Did He care for even the plaiting of a woman's hair (1 Peter iii. 3), and fail to leave so solemnly important a matter as that whereon, if theologians and writers on church polity are to be believed, the very existence of the church of God depends, in a state of uncertainty, a thing to be built up on the most slender, wire-drawn inferences? Is it like the mind that described to Moses the very hooks and loops of the tabernacle, and was at such pains to put the lineage of priest and Levite beyond dispute, to have left ministry in the church of God a matter of doubtfulness? Did He care more for the Jewish nation and its polity than for the church, which is the body of His Christ, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all? No; a thousand times no, brethren. Banish, I beseech you, the pernicious nightmare from your souls; seek not to impute to Him things He

has not done, nor to tack on human shreds of fancied expediency to what infinite wisdom has left perfect. Go into His presence and enquire the reason of His actings if you will; only add not to them the meanwhile, but accept them as they stand; make it your business, not to prove them to be other than they are, but to understand them *as* they are, and to act upon them. Faith's business, dear brethren, is to act on God's revelation *as it stands*, whether it comprehend the why and the wherefore or no. I forbear to state here what I have myself learned of God touching His reasons for withholding an ordaining power, because I do not wish at present to go beyond the range of the simple facts, nor to make this paper overlong. God who has taught them to me can teach them to you if you seek the knowledge, and I will see that the publisher note on the cover of this pamphlet the names of a few works that you may find helpful, if disposed to seek such aid. Meanwhile I adjure you in His sacred name, whose servants we are, to cast from you every prejudice, and test the question by the word alone.

On what does all this giant fabric of humanly ordained ministry throughout the centuries repose? On scripture? No. On human logic? Yes; on such logic as this: apostles and apostolic delegates ordained; *therefore*, men who are neither apostles nor apostolic delegates *must be entitled to ordain!*

But it may be, dear brethren, you will stumble over this query. Does not the fact that the apostle authorised Timothy and Titus to ordain, and that

the Holy Ghost preserved those letters to the church as part of Holy Writ, imply a purpose that it should stand as an example to be followed?

Oh, how long I stumbled over that stone of stumbling! It is a matter to be solemnly and earnestly weighed, where, I trust, you have taken all previous questions, before the Lord; for it affects a most important principle in what the apostle terms the “rightly dividing the word of truth.”

We are agreed as to the plenary inspiration of the scriptures—of the whole scriptures—and that the plan and form of the revelation is as much a part of the divine wisdom as its subject-matter, and to be carefully attended to in its interpretation. If He has given some portions of scripture in the form of letters addressed to the church of God, and others in the form of private letters to individuals, He has done it advisedly and of set purpose, with the view that the things therein set down might bear differently on the minds and actions of His people. Had a commission to ordain elders, like that addressed to Titus, presented itself in any epistle addressed to an assembly of the church of God, unless some special intimation had expressly limited it to a purely local bearing, I should not have hesitated to accept it as conferring ordaining authority on the church to all time and in all places. And why so? Simply because the church of God, being ONE in God’s mind and purpose—however man’s wickedness may have thrust this truth aside—what He addresses to the church in one place and period He addresses to the

whole, irrespective of separating distance or time—to the assemblies in England or America, as to those in Ephesus or in Corinth; to the assemblies in the nineteenth century, as to those in the first. When, however, it becomes a question of the application of things written in a private letter to a particular individual, I shall go monstrously astray if I act indiscriminately on the same principle. So far as the individual addressed is spoken to merely *in his character of a child of God*, I shall do right to apply every word spoken to the guidance of myself or any other child of God *who may be found in identical circumstances* at any time, because God's mind, being one and unvarying, has not two sets of principles or two modes of action for His children under identical circumstances. Hence, when I meet in such epistles with exhortations like "Fight the good fight of faith," "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity," I have no difficulty as to the right of appropriation. But when I read orders to the man Timothy or the man Titus about ordaining elders, I dare not appropriate such a commission to myself, or assign it to another: neither he nor I are Timothy or Titus, *nor can we ever find ourselves in identical circumstances* with them, till an apostle shall have said of us, as of them, "I besought thee to continue in Ephesus (or elsewhere), that thou mightest charge some," &c.; "I left thee in Crete (or elsewhere), that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city." In short, there can be no parallel till I or he find

ourselves apostolic delegates, as were the men addressed.

If the general of an army should address a proclamation to his "soldiers," it would apply to every soldier in the army, from a brigadier to the rank and file, unless where special limitations were introduced; but if the same general, at the same time, addressed special instructions to Brigadiers A. and B. with respect to their individual commands, and these letters fell into the hands of some of the rank and file, or even into those of Brigadiers C., D., and E., would they be entitled to take them up and act on them? They would be court-martialed if they did.

There is one portion of the New Testament over which the Spirit of God has exercised a special care, in order to secure the recognition of its universal application to the church of God; and in nothing is His prescient wisdom more conspicuous. Alas! it is precisely that portion of the word whose universality of application has been most practically denied and set aside. I allude to First Corinthians. That epistle is the one in which He has given to the church His mind as to the mode of conducting assemblies in the matters of discipline, worship, and the Lord's table; yet it has become in these very respects almost a dead letter, and the so-called "worship" of the "churches" is formed on models as unlike it as possible. Because the miraculous element in the Spirit's manifestations has been withdrawn, it has been coolly taken for granted that the whole order is obsolete—a local affair of Corinth—a matter in nowise

binding the action of Christian assemblies to-day; aye, and the very people who found the largest claims on an appropriation of instructions to private individuals are also those who most thoroughly ignore the order of the Spirit, unfolded in an epistle addressed to the church of God—and that, too, an epistle which the gracious Spirit, foreseeing the departure, was careful to address, as no other, to “all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.”

One more subject, in special connection with this same epistle, I desire, dear brethren, to urge on your consideration before I take my leave of you—the Lord’s Supper.

I put it to you, in the presence of our God and Father, What authority have you in the word for the appointment of any man or class of men to break the bread and minister at the Lord’s table? Have you ever looked into the word on the subject? or have you gone on from year to year, assuming all was right, because you have been brought up to it? Oh, brethren, it is fearful, this *taking for granted* in the things of the Lord, when He has given us a book of His own writing, “a light unto our feet and a lamp unto our path.” Will you test it with me now, fairly, simply?

To your Bible, then, dear brother, and search; produce from it one shadow of an intimation of a divine appointment to such a place. You cannot. It is not there!

Perhaps, however, you would refer me to the fact

that the apostles, and they only, were the persons present when the Supper was instituted, and be disposed to claim that as something to the point. Let us weigh it, then, by all means. Supposing this to be so—that the apostles *in their official character*, and they alone, received the direction, “Do this in remembrance of me”—what then? It would involve this: that the act was to be *apostolic*, and so *only apostles* would be authorized to do it, *unless you could adduce some express provision to the contrary*, showing who beside might. You will hardly be willing to stand by that, my brother. But how are the facts? If I turn to the account of the Supper by Luke, I find the twelve indeed spoken of there as “the twelve apostles” (Luke xxii. 14); but when I go to Matthew and to Mark (Matt. xxvi. 19; Mark xiv. 16), I find them named simply “disciples,” a name they share in common with all. So that either they were there in their simple character of believers, and so what was done would apply equally to all others—the word elsewhere making it clear, that it was for others as well as for them—which gives no sanction to any kind of class appointment whatever; or they were there in their own special official character as apostles, which would narrow all within their own circle; for the notion that they were representatives in this of an ordained ministry is a mere assumption without a particle of scripture basis, all the weaker that they themselves were never “ordained” at all in the sense required.

All the guidance we have on the subject, beyond

this, is what we meet with in the aforementioned epistle to the Corinthians, in its tenth and eleventh chapters. We there learn that Paul had received the ordinance of the Supper direct from the Lord Himself, and *as* he had received it, so he had delivered it to the Corinthian believers; and does that deliverance include any appointment of a person or class of persons to “administer” it? Not one hint at anything of the kind. And surely, dear brethren, this is all the more remarkable when we consider the circumstances; for truly, if ever a Christian assembly needed to be *fully* instructed in all that concerned this solemn remembrance, it was the assembly at Corinth; and if ever there was a need of setting some one to preside in full-ordered authority at the table, it was among these Corinthians, where drunkenness and gluttony had intruded on it. Yet not one word did the Spirit of God indite on a point so all-important, in man’s judgment. Abuses are stigmatized, and the custom of blending a common meal with the breaking of bread divorced from it (xi. 34), but no change hinted at as to the order of the matter—not one word! It is “the cup of blessing which *we* bless, the bread which *we* break,” but the *we* is no apostolic plural of official dignity, but a *we* of most general character. Why this silence, when speech would seem so desirable? Ah, brethren, to learn to interpret the *silences* of God is most essential to the understanding of His mind, *the most thorough test of obedience and subjection*.

Let us review in a practical form the posture in

which God's dealing leaves the matter and sets the church.

We will suppose a company of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ assembled to fulfil their Lord's desire, remembering Him in the breaking of bread, and that their minds, in full subjection to the word, are prepared to act just as that bids them, and stop where it stops. They have assembled with a special object in view, for which bread—one loaf (1 Cor. x. 17)—and wine, “the fruit of the vine” (Matt. xxvi. 29), are prescribed; these they accordingly provide and set them on the table (1 Cor. x. 21) in the midst, and seat themselves around. What next? They turn to the word to learn from it who among their number shall break that bread. There are among them, it may be, evangelists, pastors and teachers, whom all own as such; there may be others in whom they equally own the power and spirit of *rule*; and it might suggest itself to them that some one of these should be the man, but they are subject to the word, and will search and learn. From end to end they search it, but in vain; not one word has the Lord breathed on the subject. They have reached the limit of their instructions: they have assembled themselves together as their Lord desires (Heb. x. 25), with hearts prepared to commemorate His death as He had bidden; they have brought together the requisite materials, in accordance with the word, and there all guidance stops! That the bread should be broken and partaken of is certain; but by whom? Shall they appoint some one by election or otherwise?

No authority. Shall they recognize a *right* in any one who pleases to do it? No one has, from the word, a right to touch it. What then *is* to be done? “Be still, and know that I am God.” “Your strength is to sit still.” Where no instructions are, true obedience sits still and *does nothing*—casts itself upon the Lord, asks for His guidance, and *waits* for it. And now the power and reality of God’s truth unfolds itself. In Matthew xviii. 20 stands a word: “Where two or three are gathered together in (unto, *eis*) my name, there am I in the midst of them.” Suppose the Lord were present there to sense—visible to the eye and audible to the ear, would any one doubt what was to be done? And would any one doubt why He had given no more orders? Most surely not; the Lord Himself would be looked to for the appointment of ministry according to His mind. If the Master of the feast is there, He will assign to the guests their places, “distributing to every man severally as He will,” and if He point or speak to A. or to B., directing him to break the bread or otherwise minister, who shall dare dispute His right?

The Lord is not *visibly* present among those assembled believers—most true, yet He is there: as really so to faith as though eye and ear gave witness to Him. Not only so, but the Spirit—His agent for communicating His mind to the hearts and understandings of His people—is also there (John xiv. 16–26), there in the same power with which He spoke to their consciences and their hearts to lead them unto Jesus, and has often since then “taken of

His and shown it unto them," making His voice heard in their inmost souls, where none but themselves could discern it. Can He not make the Master's pleasure known to His servants to-day? so speak to the heart of the one through whom He is pleased to act, that He shall know the call and obey it? so speak to the hearts of the others that they shall discern and own His acting through that servant, and when he rises to minister and break the bread, acknowledge, not *his right* to minister, but the Holy Ghost's right to use him to that end?

Do you believe in the Holy Ghost, dear brethren? You profess it every week in the recital of "the creed;" and I would not call in question your sincerity. But is that belief to you a living reality? Is the Holy Ghost, for you, a living, acting divine person, dwelling on the earth, not only in each believer, but *in the church of God*, His temple (1 Cor. iii. 17; Eph. ii. 22); a person present to act, in the way pointed out in 1 Cor. xi.-xiv., as truly and really to-day, though not with the same outward miraculous manifestations, as in those early days? See you not, beloved friends, where He has reserved His own peculiar and proper place in the assembly of God? See you not why He has stopped short in His instructions just at the point where His own personal intervention and presidency come in? See you not why men are so much in confusion about church order, and cannot make the word to harmonize, but must needs supplement it with their own expedients? **THEY HAVE LEFT THE HOLY GHOST OUT OF**

THEIR CALCULATIONS.* Will *you* disown Him? Will you quench Him? Will you supplement His divinely perfect instructions by devices of your own, to the exclusion of Himself? Alas! alas!

But you may be disposed to urge, if such be the mode of procedure, will it not leave open the door for persons to mistake, and act in self-will—in the flesh—while professing to act at the bidding of the Spirit? Undoubtedly. It is the very thing that happened in Corinth; but did He tell them the remedy was to be found in changing the order? No. Has He authorised you to change it? No. What then? *He will be trusted.* Is He not able to keep order in His own house? Did not Ananias and Sapphira find it to their cost? Did not these Corinthian troublers find it so? (1 Cor. xi. 30.) Is He less able now? Not if suffered to act, and counted on; but if grieved and quenched by man's plans and systems for doing His work without Him, what wonder if He leave them to reap the fruit of their doings?

Moreover, mark this well, dear brethren: in your zeal for order and suppression of the flesh and its manifestations, you may indeed shut all mouths but those whom you "ordain" to open them,

* As though a number of persons should contend over the most proper mode of bringing out the correct result of an arithmetical problem, with the prime factor left out. I would not be understood as denying that the Holy Ghost has a place in some of their *theories*, but that He is not allowed His own place as a living and present person, and so is in no practical way taken into account or counted on.

and in so doing you will certainly have shut out much opportunity for the flesh to show itself; but—and the thought is an awful one—**YOU HAVE SHUT OUT THE SPIRIT OF GOD AS WELL!** If there be *liberty* for the Spirit, there must also be *occasion* for the flesh, if the Spirit be not present in such ungrieved power as to hold it under restraint, but if all opportunity be taken from the flesh by shutting all mouths, then is the Spirit also excluded, and you have *order* most surely, but it is an order approaching that of the grave-yard (Eccles. ix. 4)—an order which, but for the matchless grace that so condescends to human frailty as to act at times, in a measure, through the limited channels that man's *arrangements* still leave open to Him, would long since have consummated ruin. But, oh, dear brethren, shall we go on in these evils? do evil because He is good? continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid! “To the word and to the testimony!” I lay on you a solemn responsibility before God this day. If you have failed to perceive these things hitherto, they are no longer hid from you. You can never again say that your attention has not been called to the word and its teachings on these topics.

Dear, dear brethren, we may never meet again till we meet in the Lord's own presence at His coming for His saints, which cannot long delay. I entreat you, let not my word of warning pass unheeded. I know you love the Lord. You would not willingly grieve or dishonour Him. I know you love souls. You would not willingly be blind guides of those

whom your life is devoted to the task of guiding in the ways of the Lord; surely you will not risk leading them astray through failing earnestly to search the Lord's mind for yourselves. If my little exhortation have but the effect of bringing you into His dear presence, with opened Bibles spread before Him, to ask His light upon the page, that you may know His truth in these things—"Lord, what wilt Thou have *me* to do?"—my task will not have failed.

I remember well when one of your number, in prospect of my departure for a foreign land, gave me this text: "The Lord alone did lead him." How true, how blessedly true I have found it!—never more so than in His leading me on to His own simple ground "without the camp" to His own dear name alone. Oh, brethren, may He so lead you as well! Fear not to follow Him. Let no thought of consequences or results deter you; be these His care. "He careth for you." Do not be like Peter with his eye on the winds and the waves, but like Peter with his eye on the Lord, and you will walk the waters as he did.

Farewell! The God of peace be with you.—Your brother in the Lord,

RICHARD HOLDEN.

August 31st, 1874.

POST-SCRIPTUM.

IN a manner similar to that I have indicated in the matter of the Lord's Supper, we attain to the fitting procedure in that of *rule* in the absence of ordained eldership.

Let us suppose the whole assembly in any locality "gathered together in one place," and a case of discipline to be intimated as calling for attention. The question is now to discern who are the "elders" to whose care the matter by divine right pertains. First of all, it is perfectly clear from the word that women cannot be *elders* (*πρεσβύτεροι*), and that the word never sanctions the idea of such being put in the place of rule (a symbol of degradation, Isa. iii. 12); these must therefore withdraw.

The "brothers" now being left, the next question is, Who among these are *elders*? That all are not, if not quite certain, is at least most probable if many persons be present; for the Holy Ghost is not wont to confer ruling gift on all. But who is authorized to exclude any, constituting himself a judge in this matter? Most clearly, *no one*. Each individual is therefore cast now upon the Lord, to settle the matter with Him whether he has received from Him any gift for rule in His assembly, and is called on in virtue thereof to take part in its governance and discipline. If he judge himself really so gifted, he will next have to test himself by the tests supplied by

Paul to Timothy and Titus ; and if he deal faithfully before the Lord in this, he will hardly fail to be profoundly impressed with the solemnity of the responsibility he assumes, if he pretend to a voice in the rule and discipline of God's house.

If every one who feels that he cannot take the place of eldership, on the ground of the scriptural qualifications, abstain from interference, this will leave the matter in the hands of those who do ; and if among these any should be found whose lives, to the knowledge of their brethren, give the lie to their pretension—as if the man be known to be “given to wine,” a “striker,” “greedy of filthy lucre,” “a brawler,” the head of an ill-governed household, or the like—they would be fully entitled to admonish and exclude him from interference in the assembly's affairs.

The result now reached is, that the rule has fallen into the hands of them that “are over them in the Lord,” and brethren thus knowing and discerning them must suffer them to act, though in nowise authorized from the word to give them the titles of “elder” or “bishop.” To these pertain the conduct of all the assembly's matters, short of the one act of excision from fellowship, which last solemn act must be that of the whole gathered assembly, as is plain from 1 Cor. v. Receiving into fellowship also pertains to the assembly itself, inasmuch as persons only fall under the elders' rule after they are *in* ; and so Acts xviii. 27 ; Rom. xiv. 1 ; xv. 7 ; Phil. ii. 29 ; Col. iv. 9, are addressed to the whole assembly.

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